

20th Annual Firefighter of the Year Heroic Awards

December 3, 2009

In total 28 awards will be presented to 67 firefighters: one Medal of Honor; eight Medals of Valor to individual firefighters; and eleven Individual Awards for Meritorious Conduct, one individual and one group Community Service award and eight Group Awards for Meritorious Conduct to teams of firefighters.

2 Norman Knight Excellence in Community Service Award:

Holyoke Fire Department

FF Maria Pelchar

Fire & Life Safety Educator

As a Fire and Life Safety Educator, Maria Pelchar has made it her mission to educate the entire population of Holyoke about fire safety and prevention. Firefighter Pelchar brings her workshops, puppet shows and presentations to schools, hospitals and community groups. This valuable knowledge she shares saves countless lives and prevents many fires. To quote Holyoke Fire Department Chief LaFond, Maria has “truly taken community service to the next level.” She has overcome many challenges in her life, moving to Holyoke from Guatemala at age 16 without knowing English. She quickly adapted to American culture, learning English, excelling in school, and making many friends in her new country. Firefighter Pelchar continues to amaze, and is now developing classes for students with special needs.

Worcester Fire Department Local 1009 IAFF

Firefighter Robert LaRose Firefighter Frank Raffa

Building ramps for people with handicaps for the United Way at no cost to the community

When the Central Mass. chapter of the AFL-CIO asked for assistance with the United Way Ramp Program ten years ago, a handful of firefighters built a few ramps. It was a great program and all those involved had a great time. However, in the winter of 2006, a retired member of the firefighter Union, Local 1009, needed a ramp built. It was the dead of winter with a foot of snow on the ground and 10-inches of frost below. The fire service, with its “can-do” attitude, swung into action, and a handful went to Grafton in the freezing cold to build a ramp for one of their own. It was a great day-- a frozen pile of lumber, a bobcat with an auger bit, and lots of coffee. The Ramp Program and firefighters proved to be a perfect match, with flexible schedules and a vow to help people. Each year the Ramp Gang grows in number, boasting 69 members who have traveled to seven cities and towns in central Massachusetts. Some firefighters have brought children to volunteer. It is a great way for children to participate in community service and learn the true value of volunteerism.

1 Medal of Honor:

Boston Fire Department

Lt. Kevin M. Kelley (Posthumously)

Perished in Ladder 26 collision

Fire Lieutenant Kevin M. Kelley served with distinction in the Boston Fire Department for 31 years. He was the loving husband of Gloria, a father of Susan, Christine and Maureen. Growing up in the Fields Corner section of Dorchester, he was the son of a Boston firefighter in a neighborhood where it seemed all the boys wanted to be police officers or firefighters. In 1990, he began serving at the Huntington Avenue firehouse, the busiest in the city, and on Ladder 26, the most active of the ladder companies. He became a leader and a role model to all the younger firefighters who served with him, always making

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sure they learned from each call and did their jobs safely. The dangers and responsibilities inherent in the job of a firefighter were always foremost in the minds of Lt. Kelley and his colleagues, who nevertheless proudly and without hesitation answered the bell to protect the citizens of their city.

8 Medals of Valor:

Barnstable Fire Department

**Dep. Chief Richard Pfautz
Lt. Stephen Iacovelli
FF/EMT Brian Cabral
FF-P Christopher Mailloux**

Rescued wind surfer 1.25 miles offshore

On June 22, 2009, extreme wind and surf conditions in the area between Barnstable and Dennis knocked a wind surfer off his board and into the treacherous waters. Another surfer who was nearby and also far from shore, spotted him, but took close to 30 minutes to navigate the difficult swim against 6-foot waves to report the emergency. The Barnstable Fire Department immediately took action, manning their 27-foot Boston Whaler rescue boat. Working together with other emergency crews, they conducted a search for the surfer into deeper, more chaotic waters. Determining wind direction and tide strength, the rescue team went against the now 12-foot waves, severe rain, and winds over 25 miles per hour, to finally reach the missing surfer, who by then had been treading water for longer than an hour. In these extreme conditions, the team had a daunting task ahead of them in rescuing the surfer. With skilled maneuvering, the rescuers directed a life ring to the victim, and the surfer was safely pulled onto the boat.

Boston Fire Department:

Lt. Robert O'Neill

Driver of Ladder 26 when the brakes failed

January 9, 2009 will always be a terrible day for Boston firefighters, who lost one of their best. Ladder 26 was descending Parker Hill Avenue in District 5, when the brakes failed on their the apparatus. With only a few seconds to make decisions, Lt. Kevin Kelley (the officer in charge that day) did all he could to care for his crew and minimize the potential damage of an out of control ladder truck careening through crowded city streets. The least destructive path was still a horrific course. Ladder 26 hit a parked SUV, a brick wall and crashed through the first floor of a high-rise building before coming to a stop. Miraculously no pedestrians or children in the building's daycare center were killed. It was the fortitude of Firefighter O'Neill steering the truck and the calm methodical presence of Lt. Kelley's leadership that saved many lives — except his own. Once the truck stopped, Firefighter O'Neill was unconscious, trapped in the cab. The two members in the jump seats, Firefighters David Blaides and Amos Monteiro were seriously injured. Although in tremendous pain and suffering from a broken leg, FF Monteiro crawled from the rubble and immediately called for help. FF Blaides managed to squeeze through the breach on the driver's side where FF O'Neill was being drenched by an 8-inch water main overhead that had been shattered by Ladder 26's impact. He positioned himself to protect FF O'Neill's airway from the torrent of water and provided first aid. Rescue 2 arrived and Lt. Mike Walsh ordered a citywide tech-rescue response. Along with his crew and other responding companies, Lt. Walsh began the delicate extrication of FF O'Neill. Firefighters Blaides, Monteiro and O'Neill were transported to the hospital.

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Duxbury Fire Department

FF-P G. John Monotosi

Rescued elderly wheelchair user in Pembroke while off-duty

While off-duty on January 13, 2009 and traveling through Pembroke, Firefighter Montosi, a career firefighter-paramedic with the Duxbury Fire Department, noticed smoke in the sky and followed it to a fully involved house fire. First on the scene, Firefighter Montosi learned from neighbors that a woman was still inside. Under conditions of fast moving fire and heavy smoke and without available personal protective clothing he was able to break a window and remove a trapped elderly, wheelchair bound woman through a first floor window. Firefighter Montosi further assisted Pembroke with patient care including transporting the victim to the hospital.

Natick Fire Department

**Lt. Michael Aries
FF Brian Linton**

Rescued two young boys who fell through the ice

On December 20, 2008, neighbors heard faint cries for help coming from a nearby pond and called 9-1-1. Upon arrival, initial crews from the Natick Fire Department, equipped with ice rescue apparatus and equipment, discovered two teenage boys had fallen through thin ice and were struggling to get to shore. The first two rescuers, Lt. Michael Aries and Firefighter Brian Linton had to hike nearly half a mile down a snow-covered road to reach the scene. They donned cold-water immersion rescue suits and made a difficult hike through the underbrush, breaking through thin ice into chest-deep freezing water to reach the 15 and 16 year olds. These rescuers knew the boys were in trouble and exhibiting signs and symptoms of severe and perhaps end stage hypothermia. At this time, Lt. Aries and Firefighter Linton chose to take off their ice rescue suits and wrap the boys in them to conserve whatever remaining body warmth they had. This extraordinary ice rescue consumed all the resources of the Natick Fire Department and resulted in the saving of two young lives.

11 Individual Meritorious Conduct Award:

Boston Fire Department

**FF David R. Blaides
FF Amos L. Monteiro**

Riding in the backseat of Ladder 26 during fatal collision

Full write up above.

Gardner Fire Department

FF Anthony R. Alario

Rescued man in a wheelchair from apartment with 45 residents

On the evening of January 5, the Gardner Fire Department responded to an automatic alarm notification for an apartment complex fire on Lake Street. With hundreds of residents in the complex, many of whom were disabled, Firefighter Anthony Alario groped blindly through the smoke. In spite of low to zero visibility conditions, he discovered a man trapped in a stalled motorized wheelchair and in danger of succumbing to smoke inhalation. Summoning incredible strength, Firefighter Alario pushed the heavy wheelchair to safety and then joined another firefighter on a hoseline, helping to save the building by extinguishing the flames. A total of seven people were transported and treated for smoke inhalation.

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New Bedford Fire Department

**Lt. Kenneth Carvalho
FF Jeffrey Peckham**

**Rescued elderly man from 3rd floor
apartment fire**

In the early morning of June 12, the New Bedford Fire Department was called to a structure fire on Purchase Street. When firefighters arrived on the scene, heavy smoke and fire were visible on the third floor of the structure, and a bedridden elderly male was still inside. Lt. Kenneth Carvalho and Firefighter Jeffrey Peckham immediately gained entrance to the third floor of the building through the rear door, which was blocked by a bureau and a refrigerator. Pushing through obstacles and crawling through a smoke-filled apartment, they successfully located the victim in his bed and rescued him from a potentially life-threatening situation.

Worcester Fire Department

**Dist. Chief Geoffrey Gardell
FF Robert Judge
FF Robert Pastor**

**Rescued unconscious man
from 3rd floor apartment
fire**

On the evening of January 7, 2009 the first arriving companies found a heavy volume of fire blowing from the front of a third floor apartment on Haynes Street. Neighbors informed firefighters that the occupant of the apartment was still inside. A rescue crew consisting of District Fire Chief Geoffrey Gardell, Firefighter Judge, and Firefighter Pastor entered the third floor apartment using the rear stairs. Through heavy smoke, high heat, and intensifying, moving flames, the men conducted a search of the apartment. Firefighter Judge located the unconscious occupant, and with conditions deteriorating, the rescue crew removed the victim from the apartment. Though the victim did not survive, the valiant efforts of these firefighters gave him his best possible chance of survival.

Worcester Fire Department

**Lt. John Dwyer
FF Paul Grazulis
FF Thomas Dwyer**

**Saved three victims trapped on 5th
floor of apartment building**

On March 5, 2009 firefighters arrived to a call on Pleasant Street to find the third, fourth, and fifth stories of an apartment building engulfed by a well-advanced fire. Ladder 2 was among the first arriving companies, but after they had positioned themselves for fire suppression operations, two occupants appeared in a fifth floor window, unable to escape. Lieutenant John Dwyer, Firefighter Thomas Dwyer, and Firefighter Paul Grazulis of Ladder 2 immediately repositioned the aerial ladder to reach the victims' window, ascended the ladder despite the steeper than optimum angle, and rescued the occupants. They then returned to the fifth floor to check for remaining victims, and discovered one occupant still asleep in his bed. He was awakened and taken down the aerial ladder, just before flames and smoke engulfed the fifth floor.

6 Group Meritorious Conduct Award:

Boston Fire Department

Lt. Mike Walsh

**Accepting for the group
responding to the Ladder
Truck 26 collision**

See full write up above

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Bourne Fire Department

**Lt. Martin Greene
Lt. David Pelonzi
FF Thomas Simpson
FF Shawn Silva
FF Matthew Weston**

**Elderly couple saved from
Christmas Eve house fire in
pre-flashover conditions**

Onset Fire Department

**Capt. Howard Andersen
FF Ronald Aseltine
FF William Braley
FF Jeffrey Dias
FF Paul Ingeno**

A 9-1-1 call received at 9:33 p.m. on December 24, 2008 reported a residential basement fire at 120 Puritan Road in Bourne. The Bourne and Onset firefighters had to force entry into the home. With limited visibility and extreme heat, the firefighters found a woman passed out near a phone. After bringing the first victim out of the fire, neighbors indicated that another victim might be inside, causing the firefighters to re-enter the intense smoke and heat, to look for another trapped person. Firefighters found a second victim, lying unconscious, next to a dead-bolted door. While in cardiac arrest, the victim was carried outside to emergency services, and rushed to the hospital. Enduring very high heat with almost no visibility, these brave firefighters risked their lives for a rescue attempt on Christmas Eve.

Natick Fire Department

**Lt. Michael Aries
FF Brian Linton
FF Rocky Melchiorri
Lt. Kenneth Levey
FF Michael Perryman
FF Ronald Biagi
Captain Roy Mitchell
FF Stephen McAuley
FF Matt D'Innocenzo
Lt. Walter Mahoney
FF Ronald Downing
FF Kelly Babineau
FF Eric Williamson
FF Andrew Balcom
FF Sam Crisafulli
Deputy Chief Paul Tota
FF Michael Quilty
FF Anthony Caruso**

**Responded to an ice rescue of two
boys on December 20, 2008**

See full write up above.

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Marblehead Fire Department	Chief Jason R. Gilliland Capt. Daniel Rice Lt. Gregg McLaughlin Lt. Thomas Rice FF Mark Fader FF Arthur Boardway FF Matthew Serratore FF Charles Sprague FF Eric Thibodeau FF Matthew Tina	Rescue of 16 year old missing after New Year's Eve party, found in snow
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On January 1, 2009 a 16-year-old boy missed reporting home in time for his curfew. After failing to locate their son, his parents called the Marblehead Police Department. With temperatures dipping to minus 6 degrees and wind gusts of up to 30 mph, time was slipping away to safely locate the boy. The police department requested the help of Marblehead Fire Department. The fire department crews began a yard-by-yard search for the boy and within ten minutes, located footprints. Following the footprints led firefighters directly to the boy, who was semiconscious and suffering severely from hypothermia frostbite on his hands, legs, and feet. His serious condition warranted a helicopter MedFlight, but weather conditions were too dangerous. This group of firefighters prepared the boy for transport to Massachusetts General Hospital. When he arrived at Mass General, the boy's body temperature was below 88 degrees. We are pleased to announce that due to a timely rescue and outstanding care, this young man is doing very well.

Randolph Fire Department	Dep. Chief Daniel J. Kreckler FF William Brewer FF Kevin Donovan Capt. Paul Lyons Lt. Thomas LaBelle FF Richard Potter FF Joseph Messia Lt Michael McCarthy	Multiple rescues from in an arson fire
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On November 24, 2008, the Randolph Fire Department responded to an apartment fire at 27-29 Reed Street. With heavy fire and smoke engulfing the first floor, firefighters discovered an unconscious victim with burns covering most of his body. The victim was removed from the building and treated until an ambulance arrived. As fire fighters continued fighting the fire, a man approached them pleading for help rescuing his family, trapped on the third floor with very heavy smoke and limited visibility. A ladder was thrown to the window and two adults and two children were rescued from the fire. A total of four adults and three children were rescued that day. Three were critically injured, with severe burns, but all survived.

The Fire Marshal's Excellence in Leadership Award

State Fire Marshal Stephen Coan presented the Fire Marshal's Excellence in Leadership award to Senator Edward M. Kennedy for his career-long friendship to and advocacy for the fire service. The late Senator sponsored a myriad of legislation over the years that provided for a safer working environment for firefighters.